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### Introduction: Context and Content (The Contact Zone in Historical Curricular Context and Relation to Contemporary Literacies)

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**Context: The Contact Zone in Historical Curricular Context and Relation to  
Contemporary Literacies**

**By James Bucky Carter**

Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in the contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” and where those involved in the educational experience may “reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today” (Pratt 2002, p.4). I fully believe that almost every aspect of contemporary schooling constitutes such spaces and that exploring them is one of the most important things teachers can do, for themselves and for their students.

This inaugural issue of *SANE journal* is about contact zones, specifically how teachers and students at various levels can and do engage with contact zones when it comes to teaching comics and graphic novels, which, despite growing evidence for their usefulness and support from teacher educators, teachers, and librarians, remains somewhat of a controversial concept in k-12 schooling. The articles will explore comics in the contact zone of contemporary schooling in various ways, but herein I want to explore the contact zone in general, especially in terms of how scholars in literacy and the English language arts are considering conflict and how we might see contact zone theory, which originated as an alternative to a lecture-based college curriculum, situated in the curricular history of k-12 schooling. Then, I’ll offer some details on the articles in

this edition of the journal (scroll to the **Contents** section if you'd like to skip my contextualization section). First, though, a vignette:

No super-hero could save me from my first visit with the new high school guidance counselor. As I sat across the desk from her, a rising 10<sup>th</sup> grader who had just finished near the top of his 9<sup>th</sup> grade class at the poorer, more diverse of my county's two junior highs and in the top ten of all entering sophomores. She was informing me that I should seek the vocational track for my next three years of schooling, which, I suppose, she thought would be my last. I should say that I wasn't just defined as from the poorer school, but as a poor person, the oldest child in a large family with parents who never finished high school and who certainly weren't part of the community's jet set. There were kids that fit a certain description: wealthy, living in big houses, having well-respected parents. These were this county's college-bound. Not the skinny kid with the unwashed clothes and the long, curly and unkempt hair. He was... an anomaly at best.

I remember being angry but having the feeling that I needed to stay calm. I did: "I fully intend to go to college someday," I insisted. She continued to explain the difference in rigor between the academic and vocational tracks. I leaned in to her, "If I am not scheduled for classes in the academic track – and I will check with the principal to make sure I know what those classes are – you will have to deal with my mother."

Or something like that. What I remember most – yes, that kid was me, and the vignette is based on true events – is that the prospect of a visit with my take-guff-from-no-one mother was enough to convince her. I wasn't placed in honors classes right away – I had to spend my sophomore

year proving I deserved in them – but I was placed in the academic track. What if my gumption, my will, or my God wasn't with me that day? What if I had avoided conflict like a good little boy and had accepted what this authority figure had offered me? Would I have graduated with a terminal degree from a university consistently ranked as one of the top public institutions in the country, as I have done? Had I not acknowledged a conflict of interests and wrestled with it forthrightly, would I be writing this introduction now?

**Figure 1/Textbox: Caption: Key Terms Associated with Contact Zone Theory**

Familiarizing yourself with these definitions will help you to understand the nuances of Contact Zone Theory. Each of the terms is referenced in this and subsequent articles.

Contact zones: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in the contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” and where those involved in the educational experience may “reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today” (Pratt 2002, p.4).

Safe Houses: “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, [and] temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (Pratt 2002, p.17).

Autoethnography: a text “in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them....that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts” (Pratt 2002, pgs. 5-6).

Transculturations: “processes whereby members of subordinated groups or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by dominant or metropolitan culture” (Pratt 2002, p.9).

Speech acts: too often homogenous, monolingual representations of voices of power which need to be transformed into dialogic entities rather than teacher-based or dominant discourse-based.

Unsolicited oppositional discourse: along with parody, resistance, and critique, things that need to be seen more in classrooms. Students engaged in less teacher-centered modes of learning may feel more free to challenge norms and engage in critical literacy practices, making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections as they feel comfortable discussing their own, other people's, and other entities' positions and positionality.

I will say it again: schooling is a contact zone. If not for a Green Lantern-like will, the contact zone engaged between me and my guidance councilor might have significantly altered my lifeline. Worse, I might never have realized it. Imagine how many hundreds of other students might have simply assumed that the authority figure was right. Of course, teachers and counselors can be on the other side of those power relations as well. Too often, conflict -- or meeting it, studying how we clash with it, and grappling with how to resolve it -- is pushed aside in our schooling interactions, like a dirty little unexamined secret. I am here to tell you that putting it front and center for both teachers and students is an important, even heroic, task. Before seeing how recent scholarship in literacy and the English language arts is finally embracing conflict, and where comics and graphic novels fit in, though, let us consider Pratt's contact zone in terms of curricular theories:

In divorcing herself from a traditional lecture-based classroom setting, which was and is essentially a receptacle model of learning, Pratt develops a preference for a more **critical pedagogy**, a system of education that recognizes students' personal and social worlds, that is more constructivist and critical in nature and which calls for examination of the self in relation to myriad other social, political, and cultural constructs. She says that when her classroom was in the contact zone, "[e]very single text we read stood in specific historical relationships to the students in the class" even as "the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous" (2002, p.16). Pratt suggests that contact zone pedagogy "put[s] ideas and identities on the line" (p.16) as students draw from prior knowledge, build communal knowledge and come to "constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of

trust, shared understandings” (p.17) and more even as they explore and examine rage, incomprehension, pain, wonder, revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdoms (p.17).

Pratt’s goal is to make the classroom a more organic place, a living, breathing social space filled with freethinking individuals of both similar *and* diverse experiences. When these experiences are wrapped up in the culture of the classroom as well as in newly acknowledged culture/s at large, a contact zone can be enacted, and social issues and the texts that get at them (including the texts of the self) are the prime agents of engagement. In Pratt’s construction of the contact zone, “no one was excluded, no one was safe” (Pratt 2002, p.17). A level of sharing and revealing, of contributing and creating, gives everyone equal authority, which can be freeing even as it is unnerving. Pratt concludes her essay by situating her theory in larger pedagogical precedents and movements:

Our job in the Americas course [the course where she and her students developed and implemented contact zone principles] remains to figure out how to make that crossroads the best site of learning it can be. We are still looking for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone.<sup>1</sup> These will include, we are sure, exercises in storytelling and in identifying with ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others’ experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to

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<sup>1</sup> I assume Pratt refers to her students as well as to educators with similar desires for change when she references this “We.” Pratt is drawing on her personal experiences as exemplars of how the contact zone can be applied or employed in settings beyond her own classroom.

interact with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories); ways *to move into and out of* [author's emphasis] rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of cultural mediation.” (Pratt, 2002, p.17)

Pratt essentially calls for a radical reinvention of the college curriculum. As such, her theory can be situated squarely in the tradition of other **reconceptualist** educators. It is no surprise that Pratt often reads like a paraphrasing of Paulo Freire (1970), or that contact zone scholars such as Daphne Key (2002), Robert D. Murray (2002) see connections between Freire and Pratt. As well, Gaughan (2001) is quick to connect Pratt's concept to his own contact zone work in the secondary English classroom and refers specifically to the works of reconceptualists Maxine Greene (1992) and Henry Giroux (1992) as other influences.

Yet, aspects of contact zone theory can be traced even further into the history of education and curriculum. For example, the strong focus on discourse and self-analysis seems to me to be directly tied to Socrates' infamously mind-bending dialogues. Because of the dialogic relations involved in both, contact zone theory and Paideia seminar strategies (Adler 1982) are complementary. Paideia seminars are highly Socratic in that they ask teachers and students to focus on asking questions of increasing depth, intricacy and relativity. They are also highly democratic and equalize the discursive authority of both students and teachers in that everyone is

expected to participate in discussion and to contribute to the class' shared knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Much more recent work by James Gee (2005), which asks educators and students to attempt examination of the sometimes subconscious frameworks they bring to educational and social settings continues to explore the discourse/discord connection inherent in working in the contact zone. Contact zone teaching is **reconceptualist and discursive** in nature, drawing from pedagogies of the ancient past and more recent times.

John Dewey "emphasized that starting with the experience of the child, far from producing *laissez-faire* classroom arrangements, increased rather than replaced the demands on judgment by the teacher in directing each pupil's learning toward worthwhile goals" (Dewey 2004, p. 4). It is a basic tenet of his philosophy that education and the curriculum be based on the "existing social life" (p.4). Pratt calls for a similar recognition of students as situated cultural and social entities. Both Dewey and George S. Counts, a contemporary, were proponents of education as a means to create a more humane and democratic society (Flinders and Thornton 2004, p.6). Counts argued as early as the 1930s that "teachers should deliberately reach for power and then make the most of their conquest" (Counts 2004, p.30) in the larger social world. Counts wanted teachers to be empowered activists who would be worthy of a great, earned respect. Pratt's concepts of teacher-power in the classroom are different, but she is tied to Counts' legacy in that both see teachers and their classrooms as places where the established

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, the activity is still very teacher-driven in its formal aspects as there are specific rules by which students must participate (see <http://www.paidiea.org>). As well, Paideia seminars often veer from their Socratic roots in that they are mostly text-based at the expense of self-analysis. Pratt extends ideas of text to include the individual in multiple contexts, so any Paideia seminar drawing from Pratt's pedagogy must be sure to extend discussion from written texts to the texts of the students themselves.



social orders and power-relations should be open to examination. Pratt too sees teachers as activists, but activists who seek to share their authority rather than wield it like a sword.

Dewey, Counts, Harold Ruggs and William Kilpatrick are among the many early 19<sup>th</sup>-century educators deemed “social reconstructionists,” and Pratt’s contact zone seems deeply rooted in many aspects of their value systems, such as teaching students to be “active participants in a democratic civic community, able to envision, articulate, and act on conceptions of a better world” (Westheimer and Kahne 2002, p.2). These **reconstructionists** see curriculum as “an active force having direct impact on the whole fabric of its human and social context” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman 1996, p.29) and “see schooling as an agency of social change” while demanding “that education be relevant both to the student’s interests and to society’s needs” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman 1996, p.29). Pratt is essentially calling for a pedagogy that acknowledges social contexts and ties them directly to issues of great relevance to students and their societies.

**Reconceptualist** educators and scholars have advanced many ideas important to the social reconstructionists. In addition to Freire, Greene, Giroux, and Adler are scholars such as William F. Pinar, Nel Noddings, Michael Apple, Elliot Eisner, Ira Shor, Stanley Aronowitz, and Jonathan Kozol. Allan C. Ornstein and Francis P. Hunkins (2004) say of the reconstructionists that their aims are “to improve and reconstruct society” and that they have a tendency to see “education for change and social reform” (p.55). As a group, they see the educated person as needing the “skills and subjects needed to identify and ameliorate problems of society” and would define learning as “active and concerned with contemporary and future society” (Ornstein

and Hunkins 2004, p.55). Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1996) draw on work by Paul Klohr to say that reconceptualists generally take a “holistic, organic view” of humankind and see the individual as “the chief agent in the construction of knowledge” (p.224). Furthermore, “personal liberty and the attainment of higher levels of consciousness become central values” as do “diversity and pluralism,” and reconceptualists seek “new language forms” to “translate fresh meanings” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman 1996, p.224). The teacher thus serves as “an agent of change and reform,” as “a project director and research leader,” someone to help students “become aware of problems confronting humankind” (Ornstein and Hunkins 2004, p.55). Pratt’s thoughts on authority and activism reflect the ideology in these statements, which constitute many of the major tensions that those in the secondary arena may encounter when applying contact zone theory to their settings.

Many reconceptualists have been major influences on English and Language Arts teachers, especially since the late 1970s. Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner’s *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969) helped illuminate for English teachers Marshall McLuhan’s (1963) post-modern tenet that the “medium is the message,” explained in simplest terms by the authors by referring to Dewey’s maxim “we learn what we do” (Postman and Weingartner 1969, p.17). The message for English teachers can be simply paraphrased: “How you define English – or let others define it for you -- will be how you teach English (and vice-versa), which will in turn be how your students define English.” Postman and Weingartner’s work paved the way for others who would come to see English and Language Arts education and eventually literacy as an outlet for examining language, meaning, and their connections to culture and self.

So, contact zone theory can be situated in reconceptualist and reconstructivist notions of education, both of which have fueled notions of critical pedagogy and discourse for several decades. While not all English language arts teachers may learn about contact zone theory in their pre-service coursework, most likely many have heard of those doing similar work or advancing similar ideas.

By the 1990s, many teacher education scholars important to English language arts pedagogy were working with aspects of contact zone theory or were already doing similar work to that which Pratt was exploring in her Americas classes. Henry Giroux had published *Border Crossings* in 1991 and edited *Between Borders* in 1993<sup>3</sup>, both detailing power structures in education and how they might be revisioned to become more democratic, and Kutz and Roskelly's *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom* (1991) had detailed the language-learning-meaning continuum needed in teaching English and Language Arts in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. They called for "exchanging silent classrooms for talk-filled ones" (1991, p.xi) that use language study as a means to examine literature, culture, and the self while recognizing that doing so illuminates the political nature of teaching and empowers students to recognize and value the many cultures to which they belong and with which they interact daily (p.xii). In 1992 C. Mark Hurlbert and Samuel Totten edited a collection entitled *Social Issues in the English Classroom* that explored serious topics such as race, sexuality, authority and social responsibility, all ripe for entering the contact zone. A focus on critical

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<sup>3</sup> Border crossing has become an important complementary element of the contact zone. Scholarship that deals with literal or metaphysical political and geopolitical spaces often combines elements of the two constructs (Mendoza 1994; Severino, 2002). This is not surprising considering Pratt's focus on "intersections" and "crossroads." Isn't all comics reading comprised of border crossings?

pedagogy, a pedagogy that seeks to make schooling more equitable via an examination of systems, is apparent in their work.

Miles Myers' 1996 *Changing our Minds: Negotiating English and Literacy* expanded ideas in Postman and Weingartner (1969) and examined five distinctive and ever-evolving "literacy periods" (pp.56-7) in American history before advocating for a critical/translational literacy approach to teaching English. This approach is similar to Kutz and Roskelly's in that it favors language exploration and observation and connections therein to the self (Myers 1996, p.285). It also acknowledges the necessity of shifting from one perspective, stance, and/or mode to others and of recognizing and using various sign systems (pp.286-288). When these ideals drive instruction and student experiences, knowledge becomes socially constructed and helps classroom participants understand "public discourse and contrasting ideas about how the world is put together" (Myers 1996, p.288). The focus on cultural and linguistic examination and the importance placed on learning about the self and the self in relation to various surrounding cultures and sub-cultures matches well with Pratt's ideas on reinventing the classroom experience. He spends several chapters examining translation/critical literacy and the new literacies' expanding concepts of self, speech events, and agency. Decentralization in business and government, growth in technology, changes in mobility for the average citizen and a more diverse population have all led to a need for literacy instruction that seeks to translate the rapidly changing world. Interpretation becomes more important than ever, and the student who might once have been seen as taking the role of the listener, copier, or decoder must now find him/herself acting as a translator among myriad other translators, all trying to make sense of their

complex world via the sign systems and speech acts they encounter, produce, and study (Myers, 1996, pp.56-57). As he discusses speech events; moving among, within and between sign systems; and how classrooms can become centers of critical literacy and self-study, Myers says,

This balance of our individuality and commonality is one of our most serious modern challenges to self-fashioning – “to define ourselves by locating ourselves among different others” (Geertz 1986, 235) [Myers’ citation style], to learn the arts of the contact zone (Pratt 1991), to search for mutuality amidst the threatening uncertainty of many selves (Erikson 1968, 219). (Myers, 1996, p.148)

In fact, Myers sees clubs, in and outside of school, as a way “to accommodate those individual needs for separation and special identity” (1996, p.150) and straightforwardly refers to them as “safe houses,” terminology Pratt uses in her essay to define “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, [and] temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (Pratt 2002, p.17).

John Gaughan (2001) has done much for *directly* illuminating the utility of the contact zone for secondary English language arts educators, though aspects of the theory can be found in the work of others (Rose, 1989; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Fecho, 2004). Gaughan’s *Reinventing English: Teaching in the Contact Zone* (2001) provides several extensive unit lessons in which he and his students entered the contact zone to explore race, gender, oppression, and sexuality. Indeed, Gaughan’s work will become more important as we continue to explore the contact zone-graphic novel interconnectivity.

*Reinventing English* provides templates for units examining major issues such as the formation of identity, prejudice and racism, sexism, sex and sexuality, censorship, and war and violence (2001, pp.vii-ix). It offers great examples of students examining their views on various texts and relating ideas therein back to themselves and their worlds. The units' consistent format is also worth noting. Gaughan often starts his units with some form of pre-questioning about a given topic (an activity called "4 corners" is a favorite of his) letting discussion and writing activities be the dominant modes. He then goes to a lead-in text like a poem or a picture book before moving into the major texts (novels) for the given unit. Throughout, activities based in writing and discussion offer students and teacher the chance to interact with one another and to challenge ideas.

Often the underlying structures of Pratt's ideas must be inferred from the reader to exist within Gaughan's frameworks. For example, he uses writing to help "diffuse" tense situations (Gaughan 2001, p.29) and he acknowledges that students must feel comfortable and safe enough to share with him and others, but he does not overtly discuss his tactics as providing safe houses. Further, important contact zone terms such as *transculturation* and *autoethnography* do not dot his text even though he has an entire unit devoted to helping student answer the question "who are you?" (Gaughan 2001, p.13). Notice in the following quote that autoethnography, safe houses, transculturation or speech acts – all important elements in Pratt's ideas – are never mentioned:

English teachers have a chance to help students formulate answers to the question  
Who are you? By structuring our classes so students feel free to express who they

are (at least at that moment) and by discussing topics that mirror teenage interests, students will use our classrooms to try on their emerging identities. (Gaughan, 2001, p.13)

He mentions the larger construct of the contact zone directly and overtly, saying “*Reinventing English* is about the clashing and grappling my students and I have done when we meet in the contact zone of the classroom” (2001, p.9). This could be because Gaughan wants to make it clear that even though teachers might need to be aware of the elements of the contact zone, students do not. They needn’t know the philosophical underpinnings of a safe house so long as they feel they are secure. They needn’t read Myers to understand speech acts so long as they understand how spoken language is often laced with power relations like privilege, subversion, etc.

Another issue that separates Gaughan from Pratt (and perhaps secondary from collegiate teaching) is the one of structure and control. Pratt wants to see teacher authority, teacher talk even, re-imagined the classroom such that teachers and students are on equal terms. The nature of contemporary schooling can relegate this idea to wishful thinking. College students have a greater maturity than most middle and high school students, and a modicum of control and structure is necessary in any secondary classroom. This may be seen as a weakness in terms of how well Gaughan applies Pratt’s ideas, but it a necessary weakness (It might otherwise be thought of as weakness of Pratt’s pedagogy, though). Gaughan does move students “from comfort zone to contact zone” (Gaughan 2001, p.1) but does not seek to establish a decentering of teacher authority to the degree that Pratt might desire. His book is a discussion of “reading and writing methods that have worked in [his] classes” and “more importantly” a way of getting to “a

different content and different end for English education” (Gaughan, 2001, p.8), but he never forgets his responsibility to his students, school, and community in terms of keeping the methods properly structured in terms of acceptable classroom behavior.

The work of these educators show how the English language arts have been addressing issues associated or directly linked to contact zone theories intersections with critical pedagogy. What all have in common is the belief issues that are controversial and sometimes uncomfortable to explore must be placed at the center of educational considerations at various levels, both in the classroom with students and beyond it. All also share the feeling that dealing with issues that are truly important to students must help drive curriculum.

To be sure, dealing with issues of actual import to students’ lives means embracing a degree of conflict. This has not been lost on many of today’s well-respected English language arts and literacy educators, as recent salient publications reveal. In “The Case for Conflict in Our Classrooms,” for example, Revere High School (MA) teacher Mary Ellen Dakin remarks that “discord has taught me to clarify my thinking, to defend my beliefs, and to speak truth to power” (2008 p.12). She continues, “if conflict in our classrooms remains little more than a literary term for the force that moves forward, then we have sidestepped the mission of public education, which is to prepare young people for a rough-and-tumble democracy (p.12). Dakin says that teachers have become too good at policing themselves, too sheltering, She asks her students to actively engage in activities that, though structured, ask them to grapple with ideas such as immigration, citizenship, free speech and hate speech.



In her 2007 NCTE presidential address, “Where Ignorant Armies Clash by Night,” Joanne Yatvin, an educator with over forty years worth of experience, discusses what she calls “the destruction of American education” (2008, p.363). Governmental control and No Child Left Behind have created a schooling environment based on misunderstandings of how students learn, how teachers teach, and how humans interact with one another in general, she says. She pleads for teachers to “be true” to their colleagues, their knowledge bases, ideals, and their profession in general. Yatvin is aware that public education itself seems caught in a contact zone, one where the meeting, clashing and grappling is being forced out of the classroom via critical considerations and replaced with standardized tests and pressures on teachers to teach to tests rather than to students’ actual needs and zones of proximal development.

As government policy forces teachers away from substantial considerations of themselves and the world around them, literacy scholars and teacher educators continue to drive home the importance of making education relevant to students’ lives and of embracing critical literacy principles intertwined with notions of functional, cultural, new, and multimodal literacies. *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice* (2007) offers advice and research from leading educators on how education needs to be “re-vision”[ed] (Beers, p.xv) such that 1. literacy skills with which students come to school are valued and recognized (Beers, p.12), 2.that students’ language and insights contribute to new understandings (Keene, p.33), 3.that discussion becomes a significant part of the curriculum (Probst, p.45), 4. that new forms and genres are integrated into lessons and real-life applicability of texts and lessons is stressed (Lesesne, p.66), and 5. that reading, writing, and thinking in the English language arts classroom ultimately

contributes to the handover of civic responsibility from adults to burgeoning adults (Bomer, p.303). What is important to note about this publication is that it recognizes that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a critical pedagogy must also be a multifaceted one, **multimodal** and with an expanding notion of textuality, interaction, and reading.

*Secondary School Literacy: What Research Reveals for Classroom Practice* (2007) is similarly themed, advising teachers to, as Richard Beech and David O'Brien have put it "reach beyond the familiar curriculum framework that artificially separates reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing to explore how reading and writing may be integrated by engaging students in practices involved in better understanding texts" (p.217), those texts including students and their worlds (Leander and Zacher p.138). The series forward to *Controversies in the Classroom: A Radical Teacher Reader* (2008) advocates for considerations of justice in teaching and asks teachers to say

Goodbye to teaching that is smug and self-satisfied, teaching as authoritative and proud, hiding its conflicts and uncertainties behind a lectern, a textbook, or a 'social science' conceit. Goodbye to teaching that is clerking –something quickly learned, easily assessed, instantly remediated. Goodbye to teaching as trivial pursuit of the obvious.

Welcome to an approach that is overflowing with life, crackling with the surprise and contradictory harmonies of intimacy and love, stunning in its hope for a better world. Welcome to teacher as value-laden, inspirational, and imperfect – a never-ending voyage of discovery and surprise, a continuous work in-progress (xi)

then offers examples of teachers openly engaging with topics such as terrorism, war, globalization, race, ethnicity, language, gender and sexuality.

These texts reveal that informed English language arts and Literacy educators *are* striving to create classroom environments that foster **critical literacy and critical pedagogy**, that acknowledge students' skills and lives and prior knowledge, and which are open to construction of meanings as students make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. NCTE has published statements on visual literacy, multimodal literacy, fair use in the media, and has defined texts, reading, and being literate broadly at least since 1996. The publication of *Standards for the English Language Arts* – which defines English language arts as reading, writing, listening, speaking, visualizing and visually representing -- firmly articulates that “Being literate in contemporary society means being active, critical, and creative users not only of print and spoken language but also of the visual language of film and television, commercial and political advertising, photography, and more” (p.6). Embracing conflict appears to mean embracing new forms of expression and grappling with new social spaces and the contact zones inherent in them. A contact zone pedagogy, therefore, is one that may embrace critical, reconceptualist, reconstructivist, visual, social, and multimodal literacies.

In terms of the journal you are reading, this all suggests to me that excellent 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching in the English language arts must be teaching in the contact zone. And if one is to teach the complete English language arts experience, visual texts need to be studied. The articles in this journal will detail how various teachers and teacher educators are meeting, clashing, and grappling with ways to integrate comics and graphic novels into their classroom.

## Contents

Michael Bitz's groundbreaking work with students in the Comic Book Project leaves little doubt that comics can be used to bolster multiple literacy skills. I am pleased to offer readers an article that complements his recent monographs *Manga High: Literacy, Identity and Coming of Age in an Urban High School* (2009) and *When Commas Meet Kryptonit: Classroom Lessons from the Comic Book Project* (2010). It is my belief that Bitz's work is capable of obliterating any conflict remaining from folks who remain skeptical of comics' pedagogical potential. My own contribution explores contact zone precepts in relation to my autoethnographic development as a reader and scholar and suggests that super-hero comics can be as rich a source for mining cultural contact and conflict in schooling as any other genre – in the comics form or otherwise. Nick Kremer shares an article on how he used comics in the classroom to teach mythology but also to make attempts at resolving hot-button issues regarding that literature and larger social and cultural relevance. Laura L. Beadling's focus on Okubo's *Citizen 13660* and how she has taught it may challenge readers' notions of comics in and of themselves while offering compelling analysis.

Of course, one area of conflict and contact regarding the teaching of comics art in the k-12 classroom is feeling comfortable doing so. To assist in that regard, the journal's "Rationales" section offers specific justifications for using certain graphic novels in the classroom. Each rationale suggests an appropriate grade level for a given text, a summary of its contents, a mention of any controversial elements and how they might be addressed, and even lesson ideas for integrating the text into the classroom and with other possible texts. Crag Hill and Brian

Kelley offer rationales for *Pride of Baghdad* and *Magneto Testament*, respectively.

Accompanying these useful resources is Susan Spangler's review of a text bound to help teachers use sequential art in the classroom more confidently and competently, Katie Monnin's *Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classroom* (2010).

When I was considering what the contents of this journal should look like, I never anticipated that an early submission would be a poem. Nor did I think it would be one that so perfectly matches the tenor of this edition. Gale Alcuff's "Comic Vision" forced me and the review board to meet, clash, and grapple with what to do with such texts that clearly connect with the journal's content but that do not fit neatly. To that end, I created an "Emanata" section. I urge readers not to see "Emanata" as something "extra," but just as important an element to the journal as emanata is to comics themselves. Alcuff's poem is joined by the first global distribution of Bran Kelley's *Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, and Comics*, which was originally distributed as a PDF to a small audience of educators in New Jersey in 2009 in order to facilitate teachers' desires to incorporate graphic novels into their classrooms.

I want to thank the members of the Editorial Board and all the reviewers for helping make this issue a reality. The authors are to be praised for their patience and the quality of their work, and I hope they will forgive me any mistakes made in trying to present their excellent efforts.

Charles Hatfield has recently stated that he does not feel that comics studies can ever have a self-contained identity. Nor should it, he argues. Rather, "comics studies will bring together various disciplines and methodologies in a workspace that is at least multidisciplinary if

not truly interdisciplinary. Ideally, it will go further, fostering collaboration and collegueship across disciplinary and programmatic boundaries” (2010, p.2). As someone often asked to peer review articles on the intersection of comics and literacy, I often see the hints of this multidisciplinary but also view its growing pains. At times, it seems hard to give or get a fair peer review when one seeks to publish or is asked to offer professional opinions on comics-and-pedagogy-related work. I often see literacy scholars summing up comics scholarship’s big ideas with a slight nod to Will Eisner or Scott McCloud, as if they are the only thinkers available who consider the medium. Likewise, I sometimes see scholars in the humanities seem just as unaware of the burgeoning body of work on comics and education, not to say the seventy year history that it is extending. My hope is that *SANE journal* becomes an outlet for texts that bridge those gaps, for scholars willing to keep current on comics scholarship and developments in education and literacy. Hatfield continues,

In any case, comics studies, to thrive, must find a stable conceptual basis that is in no way interchangeable with conventional disciplinarity. In order to address seriously the lack of institutional footing for comics studies, and in order to raise standards in the field (which need not mean imposing one rigid set of standards on scholars from multiple disciplines), comics scholars need to develop and make explicit their commitment not simply to multi- but to interdisciplinarity. We need to articulate a rigorous pluralism — self-aware, synthetic, and questioning — if the field is to flourish. We might begin to do this by analyzing our differences in public forums, calling together areas, discussion groups, or caucuses within conferences, appointing disciplinary reviewers and/or sub-editors at journals, working toward shared editorial standards (though not monolithic editorial

practices), and undertaking collaborative projects across disciplinary lines, such as genuine team (not just serial or round-robin) teaching. (p.14).

One goal of mine as founder and editor of *SANE journal* is that it becomes a means to accomplish what Hatfield calls for regarding education's place in comics studies and comics' place in education studies, particularly, but not limited to, literacy studies. I am convinced that literacy research and educational theories can inform any other domain of learning and knowledge, including comics studies, and equally convinced of the inverse. The first step is for scholars to recognize that such diverse bodies exist, of course, then find their corresponding artifacts, and, finally, make use of them and cite them in their own works. May *SANE journal: sequential art narrative in education* provide some of these initial opportunities, and may you read the contents of this inaugural edition with my sincerest gratitude.

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**Web resources:**

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Paideia Center: <http://www.paideia.org>